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# **East Asia Biweekly Review**

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EAST ASIA BIWEEKLY REVIEW

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CONTENTS

Vietnam-Cambodia: Border Conflict . . . . . 1

25X6

Malaysia: A National Election  
in the Offing? . . . . . 6

25X1

25X6

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**SECRET**Vietnam-Cambodia: Border Conflict

Vietnam's incursion into Cambodian territory during late December and early January was meant to halt Cambodian border provocations and force the Cambodians to negotiate a border settlement. Most Vietnamese military units withdrew from Cambodia by mid-January, but aggressive Cambodian harassment--including the shelling of several Vietnamese cities near the border--has continued. Vietnamese units are also sending patrols into Cambodian territory and shelling positions across the border.

Although the intensity of clashes seemed to decline by the second week in February, it is too soon to judge whether then lull will lead to a stalemate or to intensified fighting when Cambodian forces are regrouped and resupplied.

Since 5 February, when the Vietnamese proposed a three-point peace plan, hostilities have remained at a relatively low level. Hanoi no doubt realized that the plan, which included provisions for a 5-kilometer pull-back from the border by both sides and for "an appropriate form of international guarantee and supervision," would be unacceptable to Phnom Penh, but wanted to force a Cambodian response and place the onus for any failure to reach a peaceful settlement on the Cambodians. Phnom Penh's domestic radio rejected the plan on 7 February. Cambodian statements have continued to express defiance of Vietnamese military superiority and have reflected no interest in alternate proposals.

Although the Vietnamese have intensified their propaganda and diplomatic campaigns, they appear willing to wait for a more definite indication of Cambodian intentions before taking strong military action. They were probably surprised by the resiliency and determination of the Cambodian forces and the effectiveness of their tactics and have made it clear that they would rather talk than fight on the border.

22 February 1978

1

**SECRET**

**SECRET**

The Vietnamese, who have assembled powerful forces near the border, could easily launch major new incursions if Cambodian provocations are not halted. There are major restraints, however, on future military action by Hanoi. A deep penetration into Cambodia would undermine Hanoi's energetic diplomatic campaign to present itself as the aggrieved party. More importantly, the Vietnamese recognize that more damaging attacks on the Cambodians could compel greater Chinese support for its client, further complicating their already difficult relationship with Peking.

Developments on the border will depend largely on Cambodia's actions. It is unlikely that Phnom Penh will engage in serious negotiations at this time.

25X1

Even without negotiations or a formal settlement, tensions along the border could be eased if the Cambodians scale down their provocations. Because the Vietnamese incursion and aggressive Cambodian response no doubt resulted in heavy Cambodian casualties, Phnom Penh might also find it convenient to reduce the level of hostilities at this point.

25X1

Cambodian leaders may still want to prove that Hanoi's military superiority will not intimidate them. Cycles of Cambodian provocation and Vietnamese retaliation could recur several times, until both sides find the fighting too costly and allow it to become a stalemate.

25X1

22 February 1978

**SECRET**

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SECRET

25X1

Malaysia: A National Election in the Offing?

Prime Minister Hussein's decision last week to lift the state of emergency in Kelantan State means that a local election must take place to elect a chief minister with full powers to run the state government. The election, which has been set for 11 March, will match Hussein's own United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the Hussein-backed, moderate Malay Berjasa Party against the conservative Islamic Socialist Party (PAS). The PAS left the Hussein-led, pluralistic National Front that governs the country after the Prime Minister imposed the state of emergency last fall. The result of this contest will probably determine whether Hussein calls a national election--something he is not legally bound to do until August 1979--within weeks or waits until next year.

The Prime Minister imposed the state of emergency in the wake of the PAS-controlled state legislature's vote of no-confidence in Kelantan's Chief Minister Datuk Nasir--also of PAS. The Chief Minister's attempts at land reform rankled the PAS rank and file.

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Nasir resigned from the PAS, formed the Berjasa Party, joined the Front, and is reportedly now receiving campaign support from the Front. Nasir probably formed a new party because overidentification with UMNO could cost him votes which he hopes to take away from traditional PAS supporters resentful of UMNO. Despite Nasir's apparent popularity among Kelantan's rural Malays and PAS' reputation for wheeling and dealing, PAS probably has significant staying power.

22 February 1978

SECRET

SECRET

The party's organization has campaigned at the grass-roots level since last fall in anticipation of an election. Its attacks on the national government in general--for interfering in state affairs--and Hussein in particular--for his alleged modernist policies which denigrate Islamic law--will garner a large vote among devout Malays distrustful of Kuala Lumpur's big stick.

The race will probably be tight, although Berjasa's and UMNO's combined strength probably give them an edge. If the two Front parties can gain control of the legislature, national elections can be expected soon in order for all Front parties to benefit from the victory. If PAS wins, however, Hussein may decide to wait until next year.

25X1

A PAS victory would probably further erode the cohesion of the Front and Hussein's own prestige--possibly enough to cause him more than nominal opposition for the UMNO presidency at next July's UMNO general assembly. Hussein may decide that his chances of remaining in power are better if an election is held before July--regardless of whether the PAS wins in Kelantan.

25X1

22 February 1978

7  
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Next 9 Page(s) In Document Denied

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